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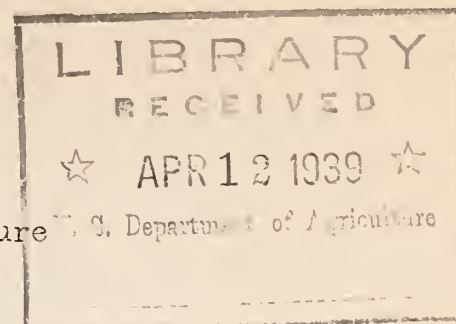
U.S. Farm Security Administration

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COMMUNITY FARMS

By

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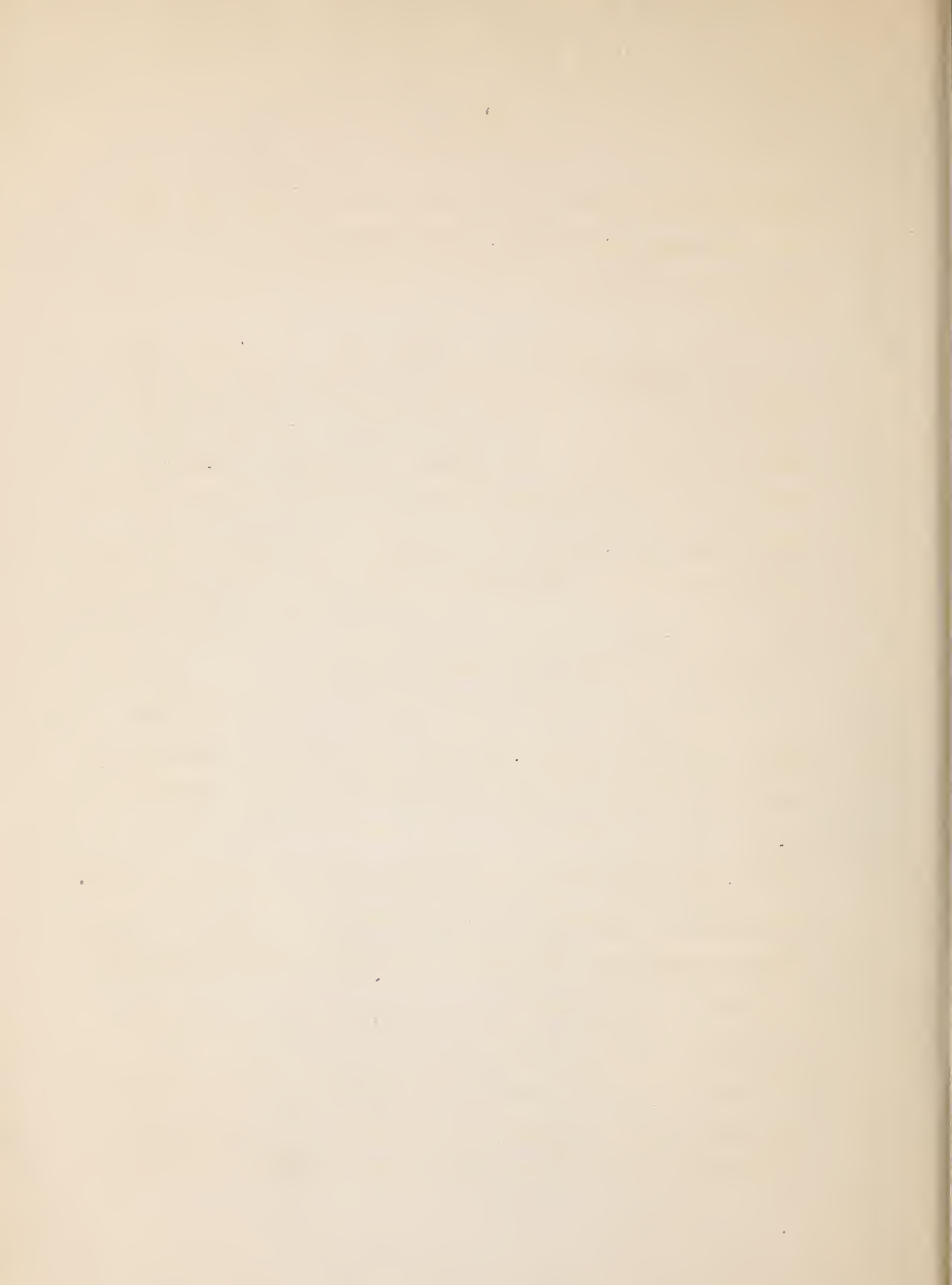


Almost every farmer in the Southwest has seen or heard about one of the "outdoor cotton factories". They are springing up all the way from the Delta to the Pacific Coast -- huge power-driven farms, functioning with the impersonal efficiency of a steel mill.

They are built, not around the traditional farm home, but around a tool shed crowded with tractors and gang plows. Often they are operated, not by a self-reliant farm family, but by a corporation hiring a swarm of wandering seasonal laborers. Such "crop factories" already have taken over wide stretches of the wheat belt. They are steadily spreading in the fruit and vegetables areas of the West Coast. With the development of increasingly efficient cotton-picking machinery, their invasion of the cotton lands may well become irresistible.

Anyone who inspects one of these giant mechanized farms must realize that it foreshadows a fundamental change in American agriculture. It represents an upheaval in farm organization and technique curiously similar to the industrial revolution which transformed manufacturing a century ago.

Many thinking Americans have been puzzled and disturbed by this growing industrialization of agriculture. They view it as a threat to one of the Nation's most cherished institutions -- the



independent farm family, firmly rooted in its own land. They fear that farming may cease to be a way of life and become a form of Big Business, accumulating a host of strange and complex industrial problems.

It is probably true that the small farmer, working the old-fashioned forty acres and a mule, cannot hope to compete for long with the big mechanized farms. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the independent farmer is doomed, even in those regions where mechanization is developing most rapidly. There are sound reasons for believing that America can work out a new pattern of farm life, combining the efficiency of large-scale machine farming with the traditional values of independent ownership.

In an effort to develop such a pattern, the Farm Security Administration is establishing thirty-eight farming communities in widely scattered sections of the country. A typical community usually consists of from 3,000 to 5,000 acres of fertile land, divided into 50 to 100 farm units. Each unit has a simple but adequate home, built as inexpensively as the climate will permit. Their construction costs range from \$250 per room in the South to about \$500 in Minnesota and the Dakotas.

In most cases, these homes are clustered together, like any cross-roads settlement, around a small community center. The heart of town is a school, designed to serve outside of teaching hours as a town meeting hall or even a motion picture theater. Some com-

munities are equipped with a small canning plant, a co-operative store, a community barn and dairy, a tool shed for housing tractors and heavy machinery. Others are built around a community cotton gin or cane mill. These facilities are roughly the same as those which would be necessary for the operation of a large, efficiently-managed mechanized farm in the same area. They are jointly owned by all the residents on a well-tested co-operative plan.

The communities are established on five well-defined principles:

1. Each farm unit must be large enough to provide a satisfactory standard of living.
2. Each unit must be planned for the efficient use of modern machinery.
3. Units should be designed to permit the greatest possible cooperation among individual farm operators.
4. The size of the units must be flexible, so that the operator may add to his holdings or dispose of part of his land if necessary.
5. Each family must be assured the rewards of individual initiative, industry, and special ability.

Some of the advantages of this type of organization are readily apparent. For example, co-operative ownership makes it possible for every farmer to use costly modern equipment which he alone could never afford. Major economies have been achieved by joint-ownership of such varied facilities as tractors, pure-bred breeding stock, poultry incubators, and refrigeration plants. Additional savings are possible when the residents pool their purchasing power in a consumers' co-operative.



A carefully planned community can realize economies in original investment as well as in operating costs. When 50 or 100 identical homes are built at one time, it is possible to buy materials cheaply on a quantity basis. The Farm Security Administration has developed methods of pre-cutting rafters, joists and sheathing in small portable mills, at a saving of as much as 60 per cent in labor costs. It has often proved feasible, moreover, to supply water to all the homes in a community from two or three wells, while at least 50 would have been needed if the farms were widely scattered.

Finally, these new communities are demonstrating certain advantages not easily measured in terms of dollars and cents. The standard of living of the average resident tends to rise even faster than his cash income, since every family is encouraged to produce enough vegetables, milk, and meat for its own needs. The very fact that homes are closely grouped gives many families a chance to enjoy a fuller social life than they have ever known. They find schools, churches, and a host of flourishing community institutions almost at their doorsteps. While these things seem commonplace to city dwellers, they have long been out of reach of countless farm owners; thousands of tenant families, moving on to new land after every harvest, have almost had no chance at all to enjoy their benefits.

In the thirty-eight demonstration communities, some 3,000 families are finding stability, security, and the opportunity to achieve a gradually rising standard of living. Carefully planned and sanely managed, such communities should prove themselves able to compete on

even terms with the most highly mechanized "factory farm". At the same time, they can preserve the desirable features of the old-fashioned American farm, and add to them certain important advantages of town life. If the communities prove successful -- and there is every reason to believe they will -- their pattern may ultimately be adopted by thousands of rural families with little or no direct assistance from the Government.

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